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News From Chuck Lesnick Yonkers City Council President

February 10, 2009

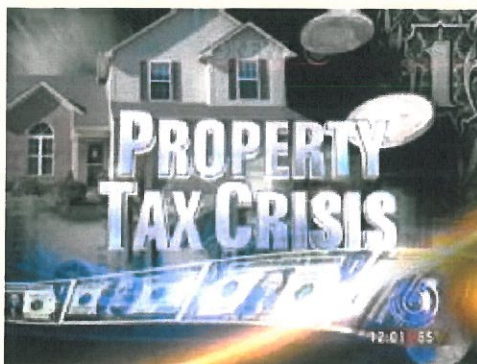
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To Reval or Not to Reval



At the request of the entire City Council, Councilwoman Joan Gronowski and I will host two Q&A workshop/public education meetings on the costs and benefits of reassessing

Yonkers properties to create fair market value taxes.

We have invited elected officials from all over Westchester County to join us at the first meeting but the focus will be on addressing the concerns of the public. It will be held from 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 18 at the Will Library, 1500 Central Park Ave., Yonkers. The second meeting will be from 6 p.m. - 8 p.m. on Monday, March 2 at the Riverfront Library, 1 Larkin Plaza, Yonkers.

Both workshops will be facilitated by the [NYS Office of Real Property Services](#) (ORPS), and the Yonkers Tax Assessor's office.

Last May, the Yonkers City Council voted unanimously to pass a resolution calling for a county-wide reassessment of all property. Since then, ORPS and the Yonkers Assessor's Office have attended three public City Council committee meetings on the pros and cons of reval. Both also participated with me at several meetings of the [Westchester Municipal Officials Association](#). The two library meetings are an extension of that outreach before the City Council decides whether to vote on reval.

During this time, Councilwoman Gronowski and I introduced a

resolution calling for Yonkers to undergo its own reassessment independent of the county's. While we hope that other municipal leaders take Yonkers lead in working to create fair property taxes for their residents, Yonkers needs to consider taking action now since it would save the City much- need money that we could invest in basic services like police, fire, sanitation, parks, and education.

If the County decides to do county-wide reval, Yonkers taxpayers will gain (or loose) whatever incremental benefits are available but as it stands now, we have not conducted property reassessments since 1954. This means there is no real fair market value assigned to house prices. This causes inequities in people's tax bills whereby some property owners are paying too much tax and others are paying too little. What's more, **our property taxpayers are shelling out about \$8- 10 million per year** in settlement money given to corporations and people who are overcharged and fight City Hall to get their monies refunded. These are called tax certiorari payments.

The **one-time cost** of doing a reassessment is about **\$4-5 million --half the amount we shell out in tax certiorari payments every year**. It will only cost about \$200,000 to maintain yearly thereafter (which would be paid for by the state.) The important thing to note is **a yearly multi-million dollar savings on tax certioraris**.

Again, a reassessment or reval would establish a fair market value for every property, commercial building and vacant lot to accurately reflect today's marketplace so that property tax bills are corrected. Without it, taxpayers are losing up to \$10 million a year.

It is worth stating that **the total amount of money collected from all taxpayers will not increase or decrease under reassessment**. Only individual taxpayers' bills may be affected, depending on whether they are being overtaxed or undertaxed.

The system is outdated and it needs to be fixed. I leave you with a question. **Should you pay more in taxes than your neighbor if your houses are of similar value?**

First Lady Michelle Paterson Visits Yonkers

During his State of the State Address, which I attended last month, Gov. David Paterson reported that one out of every four New Yorkers under 18 years of age is obese. He pledged to tackle the issue and yesterday, First Lady Michelle Paige Paterson came to Yonkers as part of her



statewide tour to raise awareness for the initiative.

"[Healthy Steps to Albany: First Lady's Challenge](#)," was presented to students at the Mark Twain school, challenging them to a state-wide, six-week fitness contest.

All types of activities, from bike riding to karate, count toward the contest in which each 6th, 7th and 8th grade classroom becomes a team and tracks their exercise steps to Albany by using a conversion chart and a map. The grade with the most steps wins with prizes including lunch with the Governor and the First Lady, a trip to an organic farm, and more.

Here in Yonkers, the top class will be invited to lunch with me and my wife, Dr. Beth Schorr-Lesnick.

Obesity not only hinders our children's futures but it also creates a significant economic burden on our health care spending. New York state spends \$6.1 billion each year to treat obesity-related health problems-- the second highest level of spending in the nation.

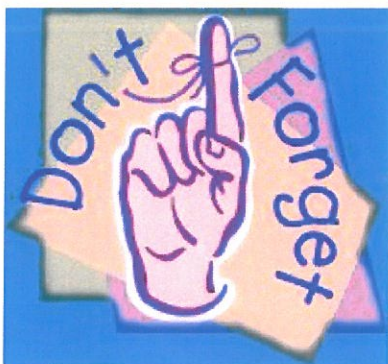
Part of Paterson's overall plan includes the Healthy Food/Healthy Communities Initiative which will offer a new revolving loan fund that will increase the number of healthy food markets in underserved communities.

It's unfortunate that our Thursday farmer's market is closed for the winter. The First Lady would undoubtedly be impressed by the number of people shopping for farm fresh produce in the heart of the city. Having held constituent hours there at the St. John's Episcopal Church site for the past two years as both an advocate of providing healthy, affordable food in the downtown and as an advocate for our residents, I believe we have a great working model that any community could duplicate as part of the Governor's obesity initiative. Many of the shoppers receive WIC food stamps, making it even that much more affordable-- part of the overall mission to make good food as easy to buy as processed food.

She is welcome back anytime!

Photo cap: First Lady Michelle Paige Paterson (right) with my Executive Assistant, Dwanita Crosby and me at the Mark Twain School.

Meeting Schedules



Please be advised that a Real Estate Committee Meeting has been scheduled for 6 p.m. tonight, Tuesday, Feb. 10 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, 4th Floor.

The following items will be on the Agenda:

1. Local Law - (Councilman Murtagh) to amend the Code of the City of Yonkers, in relation to restricting the use of eminent domain by the City of Yonkers.
2. Any additional items that may properly come before this Committee.

Please be advised that we have scheduled a Municipal Operations Committee Meeting for Tuesday, February 10th at 7:00pm, in the Council Chambers, 4th Floor, and City Hall. The

following items will be on the agenda:

1. Councilmember Gronowski's resolution amending the Yonkers City Code to allow for condominium and cooperative apartment owners to receive bulk item pickup service and availability to deliver items to the Yonkers Recycling Center.
2. Misc. - to consider any other item(s) that may properly come before the Committee.

Free Business Seminar in Downtown Yonkers

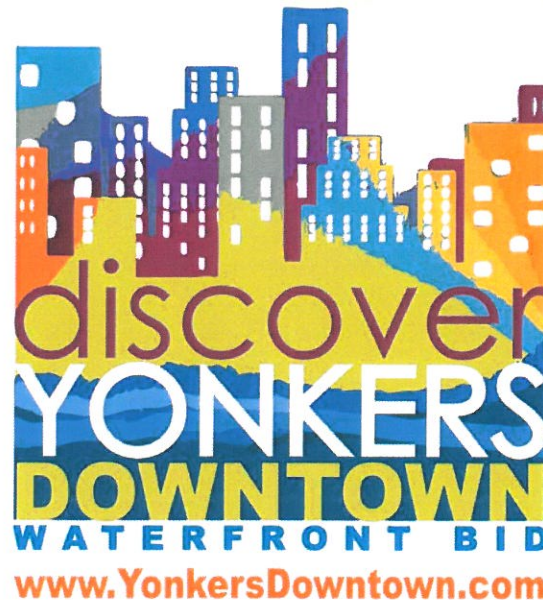
The Yonkers Downtown/Waterfront BID is hosting a free Sunrise Seminar Series to help small businesses gain a competitive edge in today's changed marketplace. Here's what's happening:

March 10 -- Curb Appeal: The Importance of Attractive Storefront Design and Visual Merchandising

March 24 -- Eco-Mania: The Environmental & Other Benefits of Making Your Business Green

April 7 -- The Secrets of Internet Marketing

The 1-hour seminars are free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be served. For location and more information, call the BID office at (914)969-6660.



Calling All Salon Workers



My office, along with the city's Office of Community Services, is offering a free domestic violence training program to all Yonkers beauty salons.

The program, Cut It Out, has been a big success in New York City and is designed to help stylists identify and assist their clients with domestic violence issues by learning what to do if they notice any indications of possible abuse such as bruising or missing hair. The training also teaches stylists what resources are available such as counseling, shelters, and legal services.

Click [here](#) to read a November 20 New York Times article on the program.

The course will be conducted by [My Sister's Place](#) from 1-4 p.m. on Monday, March 16 at the Riverfront Library. They are a non-profit organization that assists victims of domestic violence on a daily basis.

If you would like to attend, please RSVP by February 27 by contacting Carol Bengis, my constituent affairs liaison, at (914) 377-6065 or email her at carol.bengis@yonkersny.gov.

We hope you will join us for this worthwhile training program. It may one day save a life.

Photo cap: My Constituent Affairs Liaison Carol Bengis with me and Alex Borgogna of Alex's Hair of Passion who is a strong supporter of the Cut It Out program. Photo Credit: [The Home News & Times](#).

Free AARP Tax Counseling Program

Need free help with your tax returns?

Trained volunteer tax counselors through the [American Association of Retired Persons](#) (AARP) will assist all low and middle income tax payers, as well as those aged 60 and older, prepare their income tax returns thanks to Yonkers Office for the Aging. Please make note of the following times and locations:



Mondays from 10 a.m.- Noon and from 1-3 p.m. at the Office for the Aging Nutrition Site, 2 Park Ave., Yonkers from February 2 through April 13.

Tuesdays & Wednesdays from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Will Branch of the Yonkers Public Library, 1500 Central Park Ave., Yonkers from February 3 through April 15.

Thursdays from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Bronx River Road Community Center, 680 Bronx River Road, Yonkers from February 5 through April 9.

All required tax reporting forms will be available at the TAX-AIDE sites. No appointment is necessary. Senior Citizens will be assisted on a first-come/first-serve basis. Don't forget to bring last year's tax returns, your W2 and/or 1099 forms, and all other information and documentation concerning your income in 2008.

The free nationwide program is administered through the AARP Foundation in cooperation with the Internal Revenue Service. For more information, please contact the Yonkers Office for the Aging at (914) 377-6822 or The Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation at (914) 377-6437.

Pirates in Yonkers?



While chances are good that [Henry Hudson](#) at some point or another in his life was attacked by pirates, no one knows for sure.

Not even Kimberly Flook, a colonial Yonkers expert who is presenting "The Real Story of Pirates on the Hudson" at the [Beczak Environmental Education Center](#) at 7 p.m. on February 28.

What she does know is that his life was shaped by

piracy, as he sought a northwest passage to the east because piracy was so rampant on the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Also that on Hudson's last voyage, his crew turned pirate and mutinied.

Flook will also tell entertaining stories of Captain Kidd's work for the colonial governor of New York and Blackbeard's relationship to Adolph Philipse, the wealthy merchant who owned all of what is now the City of Yonkers. She will also look at the many myths surrounding pirates such as whether pirates made their captives walk the plank and whether they really did have peg legs.

She will also lay out a treasure chest of pirate booty including spices, dimity, brocade, and damask. Sview pirate flags, portraits and ships will be on display and the audience will hear songs of the sea including "The Famous Pirate's Lament" written immediately upon Captain Kidd's hanging.

An archeologist by training, Kimberly Flook did graduate work at Tulane University and has a background in museum curating and administration. As Historic Site Manager of [Philipse Manor Hall](#) in Yonkers, Westchester County's oldest building, Flook actively researches and tells the story of how colonial entrepreneurs used pirate services to circumvent the British Navigation Acts.

The Real Story of Pirates on the Hudson is part of the Saturdays by the Fire, a Hudson Quadricentennial Lecture Series at the Beczak Environmental Education Center. Future programs include:

- The Palisades Revealed, March 28 featuring Eric Nelsen, Historic Interpreter from the Palisades Interstate Park
- The Great Saw Mill River Cover Up, April 25 with Joan Jennings, president of the Friends of Philipse Manor Hall.

Convenient free parking is available. For more information, call (914) 377-1900 x 12, or email SRuff@Beczak.org.

Celebrate President's Day with Peanut Soup and More

[Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site](#) invites children, families and the young at heart to celebrate President's Day 2009 by sampling some favorite presidential dishes such as Lyndon B. Johnson's barbecue sauce, Lady Bird's spiced



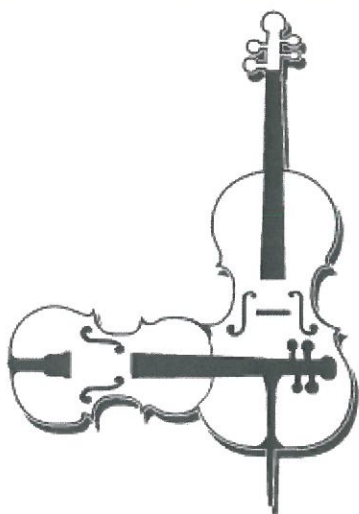
tea, Franklin Roosevelt's coffee birthday cake, George Washington's peanut chestnut soup, and more!

Revelers can also choose to dress up in colonial costumes provided at the event. Take home a free photograph. Measure their height against that of previous presidents. Search the house on a scavenger hunt.

This free event will take place in the impressive Gothic Chamber of the Manor, from 12-4 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 15.

For more information, click [here](#) or call or call (914) 965-4027. If you would like to arrange a similar event for your school or group, please contact Brittany Wheeler, Museum Programs Coordinator, at Brittany.Wheeler@oprhp.state.ny.us. Inquiries are always welcome.

Park Hill Concert Series



Come hear Park Hill residents Deborah Wong on violin and Chris Finckel on cello Sat 3 p.m. on Sunday, March 1. The music program includes works by Bach & Kodály. Tickets are \$20. Reservations required, seating will be limited. All proceeds to benefit the Yonkers Land Conservancy, Inc. (formerly the Park Hill Land Conservancy) in its never-ending mission to beautify our neighborhood and Yonkers by planting trees and preserving open spaces.

For tickets and reservations, please send a check (payable to Yonkers Land Conservancy, Inc.), with a self-addressed stamped envelope to Yonkers Land Conservancy, Inc. c/o Nancy Headley, 86 Ridge Road, Yonkers, NY 10705. The concert address will be printed on the tickets.

For further information, please contact [Marilee Schueneman](#). Reception and refreshments to follow each concert.

Mark Your Calendars for Quality of Life Day



Our semi-annual Quality of Life Day is Saturday, March 21 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Riverfront Library in Downtown Yonkers.

Residents will be able to meet and talk with professionals from dozens of non-profit groups and government agencies to get help with such things as housing, health concerns, passports, legal counseling, job opportunities, senior assistance, and more.

Carol Bengis, my constituent affairs liaison, and I conceived of the event three years ago after fielding hundreds of calls to my office from constituents seeking referrals. This is a great way to bring everyone together and is an event not to miss.



Edited by Laura Farenthold

email: chuck.lesnick@yonkersny.gov

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